

CULTURE COURSES" IN TRAINING SCHOOLS FOR NURSES.

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Ever "the old order changeth, giving place to new." If Sairey Gamp has disappeared completely below the nursing horizon, no less certainly is there rising a new ideal for the profession, a nurse who shall be not only the right hand of the physician and the surgeon and the mainstay of the disordered household, but also a congenial companion for the patient. In convalescent and mental cases, especially, the successful nurse is one who can arouse interest and attention and induce the patient to enter again into normal relations with the world.

That convalescent and mental nursing require more tact and sympathy and patience than any other sort, no one knows better than the nurse; but of the fact that often the whole long medical battle is finally won or lost through the personality of the nurse during this trying time the physician is desparingly aware. While the doctors can get plenty of nurses efficient in an emergency, capable and deft in the more mechanical aspects of their profession, they complain that it is very difficult to secure attendants with the education and resources which would render them companionable and congenial to their more highly educated and cultivated patients. Tact, sympathy, skill, and patience—these qualities are indispensable; but if to them a nurse can add a knowledge of books, an appreciation of pictures, an interest in current events, she will have at her command resources which will give her tremendous advantages in the way of entertainment and companionship; and, incidentally, she will come pretty near to being the perfect woman, whose price, according to Solomon, is above rubies.

Since the demand is for this ideal, what are the training schools to do toward supplying such nurses? In the general hospitals there has been much serious discussion of the subject, and two plans have been proposed: one, that a higher grade of education be required for entrance into the training schools; the other, that these schools add to their curriculum lectures in current events, literature, and general culture. The first plan would shut out, from

both general and mental hospitals, many of our best nurses—girls who are intelligent and ambitious and eager to learn, but who have had few advantages—and it is impracticable, for the present at least, because the supply would not equal the demand. As a rule, college educated men and women do not take up nursing as a profession. There remains, then, the second scheme, that of introducing so-called “culture courses” into the training schools.

In a way, this is not a new idea. For years past more or less tentative efforts have been made in many hospitals to give their pupil nurses lectures on current events and topics of the day, but in few, if any, cases have these lectures been such an unqualified success that they have been included permanently in their curriculum. Perhaps one reason for their failure is the fact that they were usually merely desultory lectures, and not a part of the required course, for unless one has an inborn love of study, or his interest is very thoroughly aroused, he is not apt to do any more studying than is obligatory. Another cause for the nonsuccess of these lectures may be the lack of teachers within the hospital to keep the students interested, and the absence of an adequate library. Teachers may be imported—at a cost; books may be borrowed from the nearest public library, but at a certain inconvenience and much responsibility for someone, and few hospitals care to surmount these obstacles.

Taking into consideration these attempts by other training schools, when McLean Hospital contemplated giving some such courses to its pupil nurses, it counted as its greatest asset a well-selected library of more than seven thousand volumes. It had always been a matter of regret that the nurses did not make better use of the material at hand, and for ten years it had been the dream of the librarian that “somewhere, somehow, sometime,” time should be found to give instruction to the nurses in books and reading, with the view of securing to a greater extent their cooperation in the efforts of the library to get books to the patients. In the fall of 1913 it was decided to try something of the sort as an experiment, and, if it seemed successful and was appreciated by the nurses, to add it permanently to the curriculum.

As a beginning, six lectures on the development of the English novel were given in October to the women of the senior class. They were made compulsory to the women, but, because it was not thought the men would care for them and it was difficult to spare them from the wards,

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the men were not at first included. Although an experiment, and given by one who had had no previous experience in teaching, yet, if success is measured by awakened enthusiasm for books worth while, eagerness to do the required work, and, upon the whole, fairly satisfactory results in the examinations, this course was a success, and certainly it was appreciated. So many graduate nurses still in the hospital service and men of the senior class expressed their regret that they were unable to attend the afternoon lectures, that at their request the course was repeated in evening classes, at which attendance was entirely voluntary. It means an eagerness to seize opportunity when men and women who have been hard at work all day on the wards are not only willing, but desirous, to give up an hour of freedom after 8 o'clock at night to attend lectures which are not compulsory.

At the end of the course the nurses, like Oliver, demanded more. As the library was particularly rich in its fine arts department, this subject was chosen for a second course, given in the spring term to the entire senior class. This, too, was fully appreciated by most of the members, and with few exceptions they did remarkably good work; in fact, the hospital felt that both courses were enough of a success to warrant giving them another year.

It is no part of the plan of this paper to give a synopsis of these two subjects as taught at McLean Hospital, or to go into details, except as they may serve as suggestions to other hospitals planning something of the sort. The courses were made compulsory because it was felt it might not be possible to hold the attention and interest of the students in any other way, once the novelty had worn off, and examinations were given because they tend to fix a subject in the mind. There was no attempt at a complete course in English literature because of the shortness of the time at the disposal of the class, but, as fiction represents by far the greatest amount of reading matter of the present day, a very brief summary of the English novel was given, from the old ballads and romances to the very latest "best seller." The required reading consisted of a few of the great books—at least one of Jane Austen, Scott, Dickens, George Eliot; either "Vanity Fair" or "Henry Esmond;" "Westward Ho!;" "Huckleberry Finn" or "Tom Sawyer;" "The Scarlet Letter" or "The Marble Faun;" "Treasure Island" or "Kidnapped;" several of Kipling's short stories; a choice of several other novels. The idea was not only to show how the novel grew

and changed from century to century, but also to introduce the class to the very best writers, so that they might have an ideal by which to measure the stories of the present day. They were asked to write a short paper on their favorite author or book, and some of these essays were excellent in point of view and analysis.

The course in the history of art presented more difficulties and took much more time. Roughly speaking, it was based on Reinach's "Apollo," which many of the class purchased; but, realizing that most of the ground covered would be entirely new to many of the students, and that they would have little time for outside reading, the lectures were very carefully prepared to give all the information possible in the class; the outline of each lecture, as well as new names and terms, were written on the blackboard, and rough sketches were drawn to illustrate some points. But, most important of all, large photographs and (when it was possible to get good ones) colored pictures were displayed on the platform and passed among the students. Pictures are indispensable in a course of this sort, and, if the hospital does not own them, the public libraries and art museums will be found willing to lend their collections, or, indeed, to help in any way possible. While on the subject of pictures, it may be said in passing that the very best colored reproductions known to the writer are published in "Die Galerien Europas,"¹ and separate pictures may be purchased at 25 cents each. To those who have never seen any paintings by the great masters, a photograph conveys a very inadequate idea, and cheap colored prints are worse than nothing; but in these pictures the individual tones and colors are wonderfully well reproduced, and a good idea of the peculiar style of each artist can be obtained.

Speaking from one year's experience, it would seem worth while to devote one lecture to Greek and Roman mythology, and it certainly adds greatly to the intelligence of the students if a brief outline is given of the physical geography, history, and characteristics of each nation and their effect on their art. Since this course is meant for "general culture" rather than an exhaustive study of art, the broader and more fundamental one can make it the more the nurses will get out of it.

In a pioneer work like this, with an inexperienced teacher, it was inevitable that there should be mistakes.

¹Die Galerien Europas; Leipzig, Seemann. The volumes are published by subscription, but they, or separate pictures, may be secured through any foreign bookseller.

Perhaps the greatest of these lay in trying to give too many names and facts, too much detail, and in taking for granted more previous knowledge than many of the students had. Another year only the most important items will be given, but these will be hammered home. More frequent reviews and examinations will be given. The art course will immediately follow the literature and be extended throughout the school year, making it much less hurried.

The greatest difficulty encountered was in finding a point of contact from which to start, for, while some members of the class were well educated and had read widely and intelligently, many of them had had few opportunities. When Dickens is only a name and Jane Austen not even that; when Florence is merely a dot on the map and Rome a city in Italy where vague things once happened; when Homer is thought to have written the Arthurian romances, and Mars and Eros, Zeus, Venus and Hermes, whether under Greek or Roman names, mean absolutely nothing; when Raphael and Rembrandt are known simply as "artists" and convey no distinctive impression—where is one to begin? Yet, if the outlook is at first a little appalling, so much the greater is the need for a start. With a good library at hand, a judicious selection of books can be made and put for two or three months in the nurses' sitting rooms, where they may be taken up at odd moments, read aloud and talked over. In this way something of history and mythology may be imbibed almost without knowing it, and one may become acquainted with the names at least of the great places and writers and artists before the courses are begun. During the course the necessary books might well be reserved in some place accessible to the entire class, so that no one person can monopolize them. It might again be emphasized that if a hospital has no library of its own, the public libraries will be glad to lend their books.

It is yet too early to speak of results from this experiment at McLean Hospital, but it is true that the nurses themselves appreciated what was being done for them and cooperated heartily. Over and over again they voiced their feeling that a new world of books and pictures had been opened to them, and that, although they were unable to remember all the details, they had acquired a certain foundation on which to build in the future. At least they became acquainted with the great names in literature and art, and knew a little of what they stood

for. Moreover, interested themselves in what was to many of them a new-found world, they took their notebooks to the wards, talked over the lectures with the patients, got them interested, helped and were helped in turn by them toward a wider outlook and a larger range of interest. Nurses and patients alike went over the lectures, read the books, criticised, compared impressions, had more topics in common. More than once certain patients took exception to opinions expressed by the lecturer and quoted by a nurse, and called the former to account. This interest was good for the patient and not at all bad for the lecturer. Although it was a little difficult to arrange matters so that the whole senior class could be spared from the wards for one hour a week in addition to the time needed for the other classes, yet, from this one year's experience, it would appear that the nurses give more to the patients in awakened interest and stimulus than they take from the wards in time. If such courses make them better companions, and therefore more efficient nurses, it would seem to be for the interest of the hospital, especially for the hospital for mental diseases, to give them at least one "culture course" with their more technical studies; while there is no doubt that better education will make them more valuable in private nursing, whether in mental or convalescent cases.





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